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April 9, 2000

ORIGINAL

RE: LIFE LINE SERVICE BY LONG DISTANCE CARRIER

Thank you for your letter (Control No. 9906145) and information addressed to my Congressman Howard L. Berman regarding my inquiry on the life-line service by long distance carriers and a variety of flat charges on consumers who make few, or no, interstate long-distance calls that make it difficult for low-income elderly people to use long-distance calls in emergency to their family.

Commission Report No. CC 99-30, Docket No. 99-249, released July 20, 1999, invites comments from interested parties. This is my response.

According to Commission Report No. CC 99-25, Docket No. 99-249, released on July 9, 1999, the Commission launched an inquiry into the effect of certain flat charges on low-volume users of interstate long-distance service. The report says "the Commission fully recognizes, however, the competitive nature of the long distance market in this country and has no intention of imposing any unnecessary regulations on this competitive industry."

This position taken by Commission is wrong as long as corporation's social function is concerned. Free competition may work to lower rates. However, whether the long-distance carriers will freely provide the life-line service to the low-income people is another matter. It should not be forgotten that there is no perfect competition and free markets tend to create oligopoly. To think that everything will be fine if telephone companies are left to free competition is a wrong idea. Do not forget also that telecommunication is public utility.

Commission tells that consumers should shop around to find a long-distance carrier who offers life-line service and low flat charges. I contacted AT&T and others and found out that there is no long-distance carrier who offers the life-line service to low-income users. If there is any, please tell me the name of such phone company.

The poor, elderly persons need to maintain the long-distance telephone service in case of emergency to contact their families out of state. Under the present free competitive system, they are obliged to pay about \$10 (minimum monthly charges and various

tax and other surcharges) whether they used long-distance calls or not. It is a heavy financial burden to these poor, elderly. I cancelled a contract with the long-distance phone company. Now, if I dial outstate, I hear a recorded message saying I cannot make outstate long-distance calls. It means I cannot make an outstate call in case of emergency.

It is my considered opinion that the long-distance carriers will never voluntarily institute the life-line service as provided now by the local phone companies, unless forced by FCC regulations.

I ask FCC to initiate such regulations and I also urge Congress legislate the life-line service by long-distance phone companies as same way as they do with local telephone companies.



John Kim

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